Design Resource

Bhimbetka

The Art of Rock Paintings

by
Palash Vaswani
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/bhimbetka

1. Introduction
2. History
3. Place
4. Paintings
5. Contact Details

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Source:
https://dsource.in/resource/bhimbetka/introduction

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Introduction

A world heritage site, Bhimbetka is located in Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh state of India. The rock shelters of Bhimbetka are at a distance of 45km south east of Bhopal. This archaeological site has more than 700 rock shelters of which 400 caves have paintings, which shows the life of communities from the Mesolithic to the mediaeval times. It displays continuous sequence of cultures from Paleolithic to the Historical period. Painting themes are taken from everyday events, the scenes exhibits hunting, music, dancing, horse and elephant riders, animal fighting, honey collection, masking and household scenes. Tigers, bisons, lions, wild boar, elephants, antelopes, dogs, lizards, crocodiles, etc. are the animals displayed in some of the caves. Along with these some religious and ritual symbols also occur frequently. Bhimbetka’s painted rock shelters were inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 2003.

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History

Bhimbetka has a long archaeological history right from prehistoric times to the Gond period. It is also known as the largest rock paintings complex in the country. This heritage site was discovered by Dr. Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar in 1958. Now more than 700 shelters have been identified, of which 243 are in the Bhimbetka group and 178 in the Lakha Juar group. The rock paintings display the gradual development of mankind. It reflects a long interaction between people and the landscape, as demonstrated in the quantity and quality of its rock art. It is closely associated with hunting and gathering economy as demonstrated in the rock art. Superimposition of paintings over time can also be seen in many of the rock shelters, which gives us a chronological understanding of the place and its history. Bhimbetka hills are rich in Buddhist remains such as stupas in dressed stone. The evidence of Brahmi inscriptions on the rock shelters in Bhimbetka can be traced back to second century BC. According to the historical remains, the area remained occupied till 19th century AD during the Gond period.

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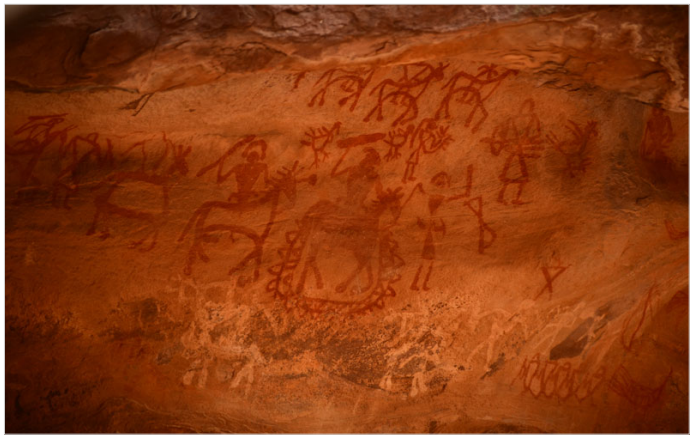

Source:
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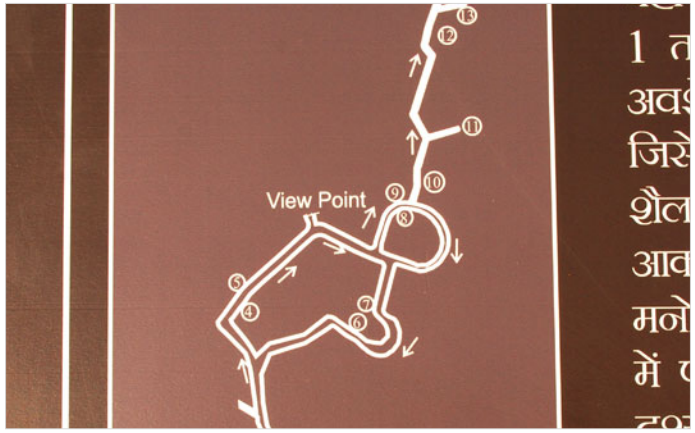
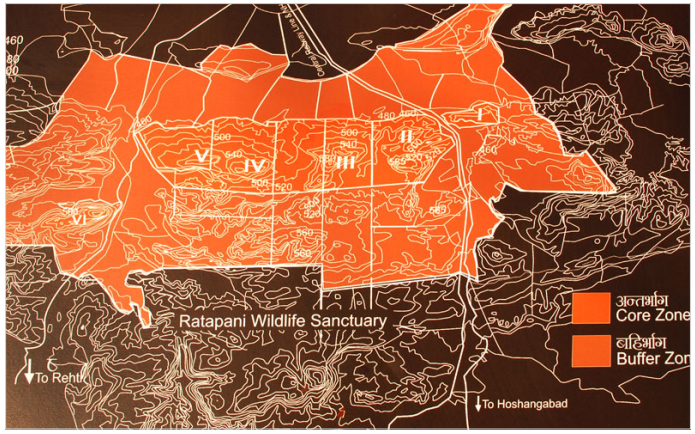
Place

Bhimbetka is a group of painted rock shelters, part of craggy sandstone formation in the Vindhya Range. The hill range that contains these shelters rises over 600 meters above the mean sea level and over 100 meters above the Deccan plain amidst the Ratapani wild life sanctuary. It runs east-west for a length of more than 8 km. These rocks look like a medieval fort from a certain distance and from the most prominent landmark in the local topography. The group of hills is formed of sandstones, which are medium grained and exhibits different primary sedimentary structures. The buffer zone of Bhimbetka has twenty-one villages established in its area. These villages are sparsely populated, mainly by the Gonds.





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Source:
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Paintings

The subject of the paintings in Bhimbetka's rock shelters include human figures, hunting, communal dances, warfare, horse riding, elephant riding and day to day activities of ancient man. These subjects are painted with locally available mineral colors such as red, green, white and ochre. The colors were derived from locally available minerals such as ochre color from haematite and white from lime. The binding medium used for the pigments are both water and fixative like animal fat and plant extract like gum etc. In the presence of water and other solvents minerals get oxidized so as to leave their color on the rock surface. The superimposition of paintings of different styles and periods can be seen in many of the rock shelters. There are around fifteen layers of superimposition that have been recorded at Bhimbetka.

Rock Shelter 1

Rock Shelter 2

Rock Shelter 3

Rock Shelter 4

Rock Shelter 5

Rock Shelter 6

Rock Shelter 7

Rock Shelter 8

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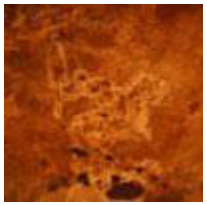
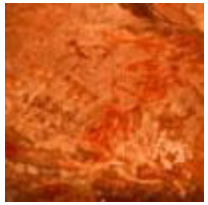
Rock Shelter 9


Rock Shelter 10


Rock Shelter 11

Rock Shelter 12

Rock Shelter 13

Rock Shelter 14

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Source:
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Rock Shelter 1

The paintings in this shelter are mostly of historic period. There is a clearly defined silhouetted painting of two elephants on the upper ceiling. Both of them are shown with long uplifted tusks. The smaller elephant is driven by a man standing on its back holding a goad and spear in his each hand, and sword on his waist. An illustration of a horseman, a soldier and two men are also seen here.

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Source:
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Rock Shelter 2

This shelter is known as Auditorium cave due to its form. The cave is 39 meters long, 4 meters wide and 17 meters high at the western end. The composition shows attractive illustrations of bulls, buffaloes, deer, antelopes, a peacock, a tiger, and an unfinished basket like object depicted over faded lines. It also displays a left hand print of a child, which is the only example of a hand shown in outline. A number of various other human and animal figures are depicted in line drawings. The cave has a number of cupules depressions on stone, associated with Lower Paleolithic period.

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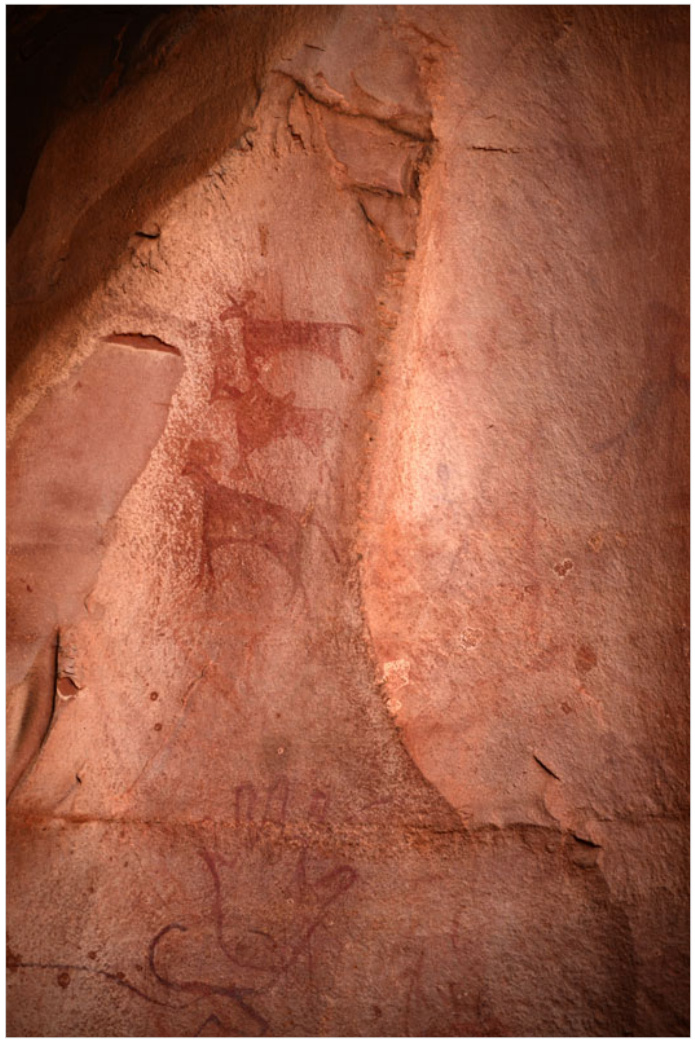

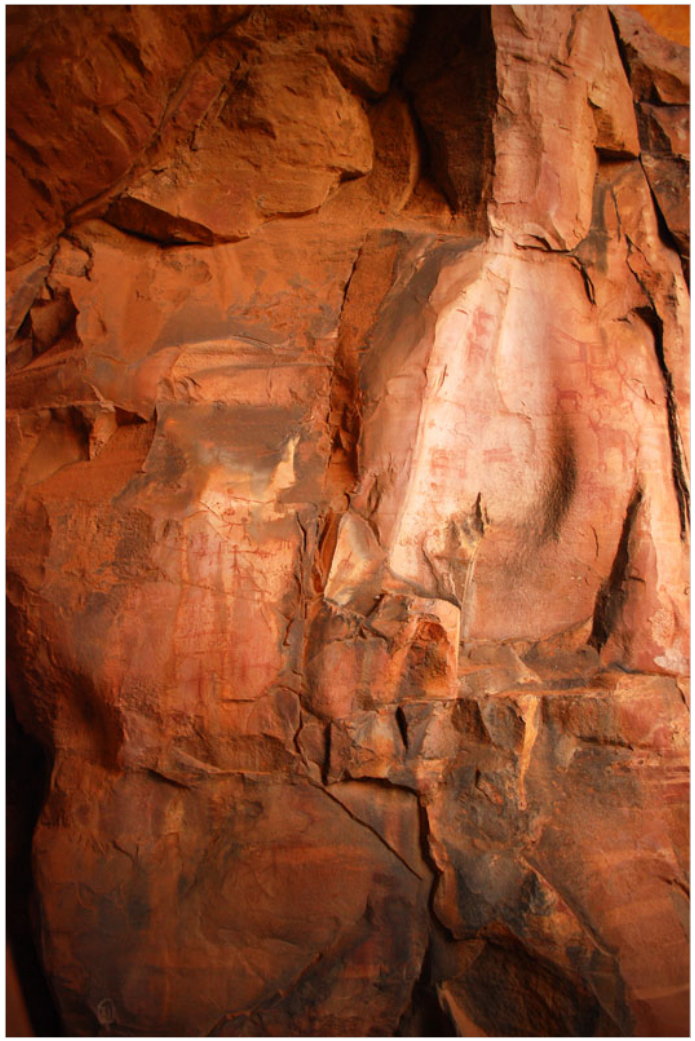

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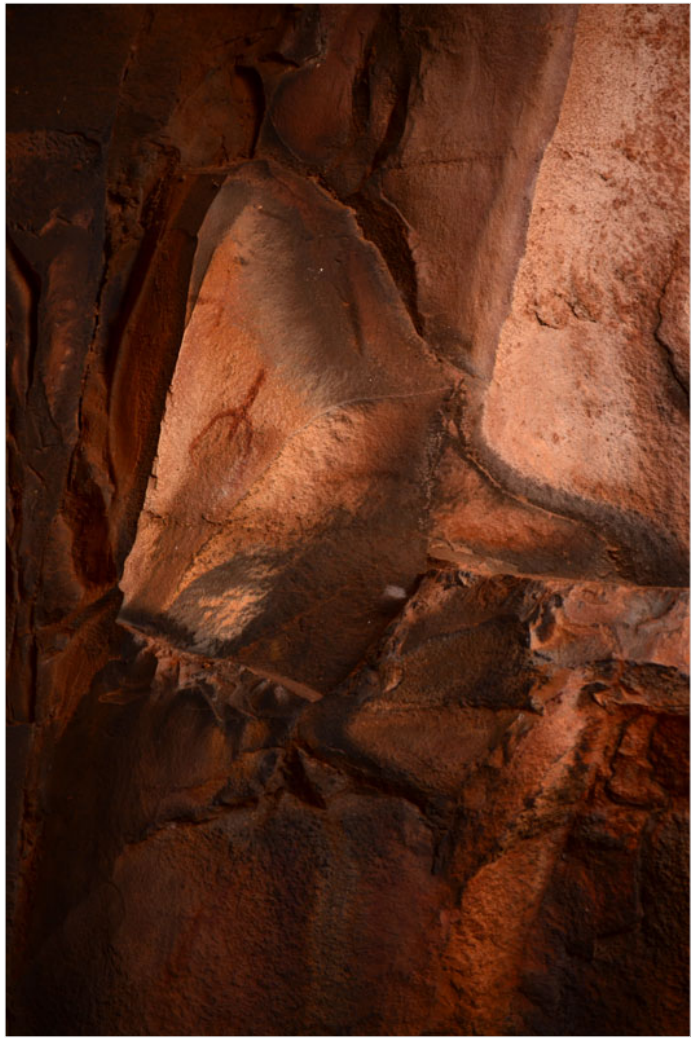

Source:
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Rock Shelter 3

This rock shelter is also known as 'Zoo Rock' due to its large scale and numerous stylish animal paintings. The shelter displays total of 453 figures, which also includes 252 animals of different species. It shows ninety human figures, one bird, six decorative designs, two enclosure and ninety-nine fragmented figures. The shelter has approximately ten layers of superimposed paintings mostly belonging to Mesolithic, Chalcolithic and Historical period.

The figures of historical period are painted in the ochre color. The warriors with big swords and shields in their hands are depicted in the line drawings. The image of royal procession can be seen painted in dark color. In this image horsemen and warriors are shown with long hair and typical headdress, armed with bows, arrows, swords and shields. Two drummers and a man carrying a staff are accompanying the horse riders.

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Rock Shelter 4

A painting of human figure in red color can be seen in this shelter. It also displays numerous white color faded paintings in the background. This shelter is located opposite to the 'Zoo Rock'.

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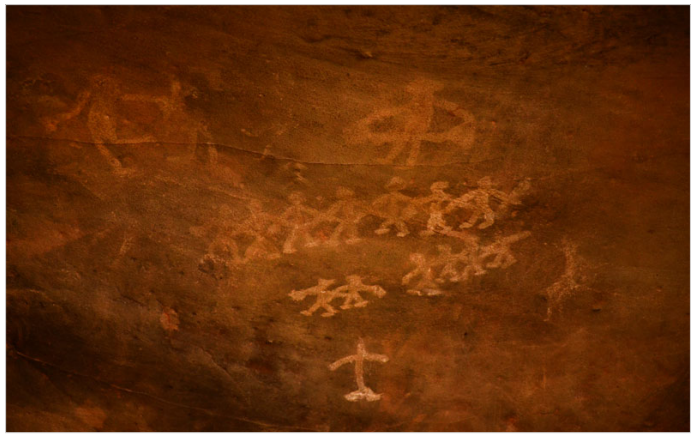
Rock Shelter 5

This shelter comprises of beautifully designed, natural looking animal figures in white color. The figures of dancers, drummers and horse riders can be seen. The paintings have three different layers of superimpositions, with the earlier ones faintly visible. The drawing of eight stick-shaped men dancing arm in arm, a dancer and another group of three dancers are drawn here. One more group of illustration comprises fourteen figures of dancers and one figure of a drummer. The dancers are shown with joined arms in three groups of eight, four, and two, and the drummer holding a drum with broad ends is painted above the dancers. Below this depiction, are two isolated human figures, two human figures on a horse followed by three individuals.



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Rock Shelter 6

The rock shelter with low entrance and an arched ceiling displays figures belonging to the historic period. No superimpositions can be found in the painting structures drawn here. A figure of swordsman riding a caparisoned horse is depicted on the ceiling. Illustrations of a row of horse riders and deer in stylized forms can also be seen.

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Rock Shelter 7

This is the only shelter which depicts the drawings of fowl, scorpions and centipedes. The paintings of the historical period in this shelter are well preserved. It flaunts of rich illustrations like that of bands of armor-clad soldiers and cavaliers. The drawings of two horse riders and two soldiers, one of them fallen on the ground can be seen. The designs of a human figure overlapping horse, a man with an axe and a vertical figure of a horse in white lines are displayed. There is also a painting of seven troops, a horse, two chicks, a centipede, a panther and a jungle fowl. The ceiling in the main shelter is badly weathered but still displays figures of soldiers, women, dog, birds, flower, and sun pattern.

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Rock Shelter 8

A wavy design painted in yellow, green and red color can be seen on the ceiling of rock shelter 9. A floral design in yellow and green color can be seen on the right side of the wavy design. Near to this, there are nine dots and a flowerpot with three white lotuses, two buds and two leaves in green. A horse with faded image of rider is depicted here too. A distorted image of an elephant followed by a cloaked human figure; is displayed near the narrow passage. The man, horse and elephant are painted in white color.

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Rock Shelter 9

The figures in this shelter are dull and require patient observation from its viewers. Illustrations of a horse rider, a king worshipping Shiva lingam, Nandi and Ganesha painted in red color; can be seen here. White color paintings of bird, swordsman, deer, drummers and dancers are also visible.

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https://dsource.in/resource/bhimbetka/paintings/rock-shelter-10

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Rock Shelter 10

Paintings of both red and white colors are found in this shelter. Illustrations of warriors, horse riders, animals and various rituals can be seen. Superimposition of paintings makes this cave an important landmark in the map of Bhimbetka.

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The Art of Rock Paintings

by
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IDC, IIT Bombay

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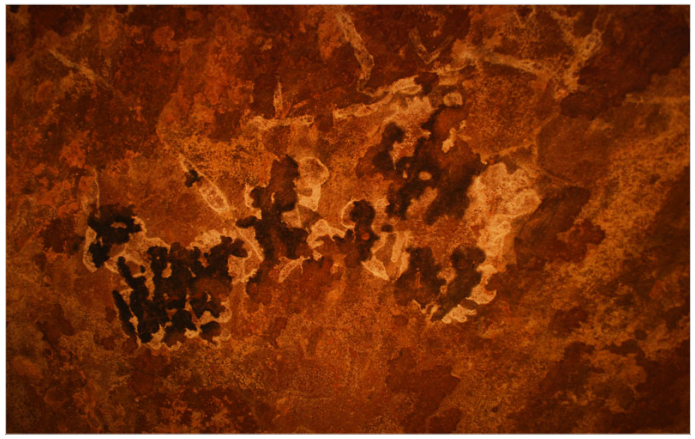

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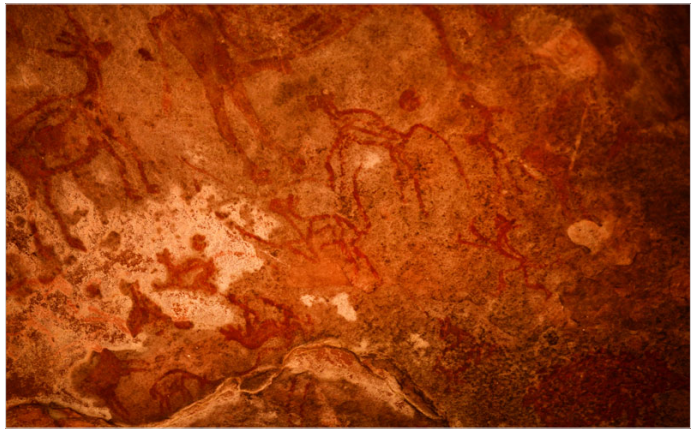
Rock Shelter 11

This enormous shelter with ceiling about 5.6 meters high displays numerous figures of humans and animals. The vertical wall forming a depression inside the shelter exhibits a painting of a buffalo with large horns. A galloping nilgai is depicted to its right. A beautiful illustration of four fleeing doe in a vertical row is made in such manner that it makes an impression of being driven down from a high cliff. A man carrying a bow and sling shown in red color can be seen below. A cluster of 38 animals with main figure of a buffalo; around which langurs, chinkara and chital can be seen frolicking. Various postures and color fillings on the bodies of animals can be noticed in this particular shelter.



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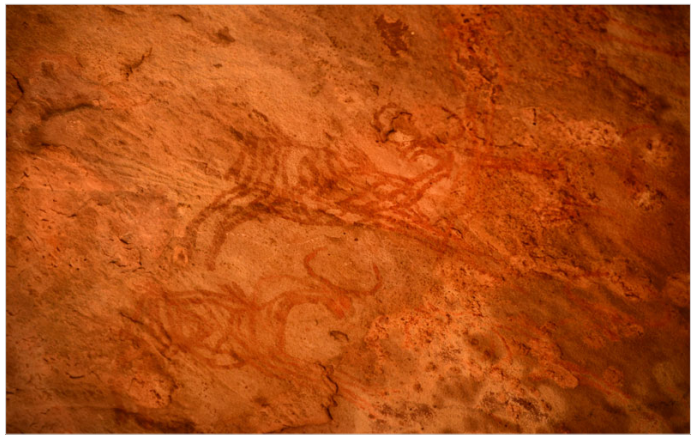

Source:
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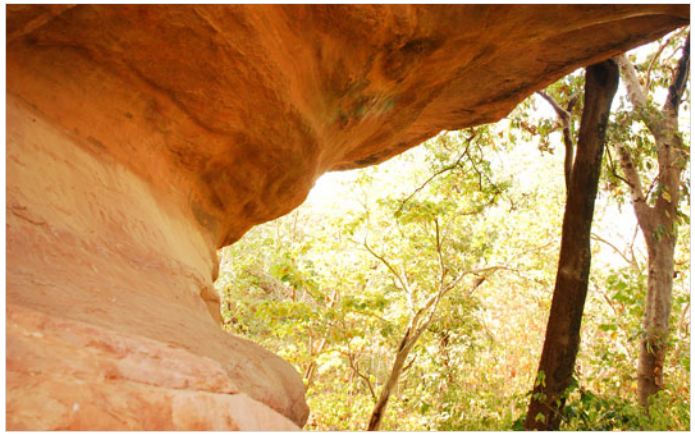
Rock Shelter 12

A ritual scene depicting a man bent over another man lying prone on the ground performing a rite with a circular stick is portrayed in this shelter. An overlapped faded bull can be seen in the background. It also displays numerous other figures of animals, humans and rituals painted in both red and white. Some animals are decorated with honeycomb pattern.



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Rock Shelter 13

Two similar depiction of mythical boar like animal is seen inside the cavities of this shelter. The painting on the western side of the cave appears as rhinoceros with the face of a boar. The animal is surrounded with eight men and three enclosures. Another painting of a boar following a crab is painted in the eastern side of the cave. Both of these mythical figures are executed in light red.

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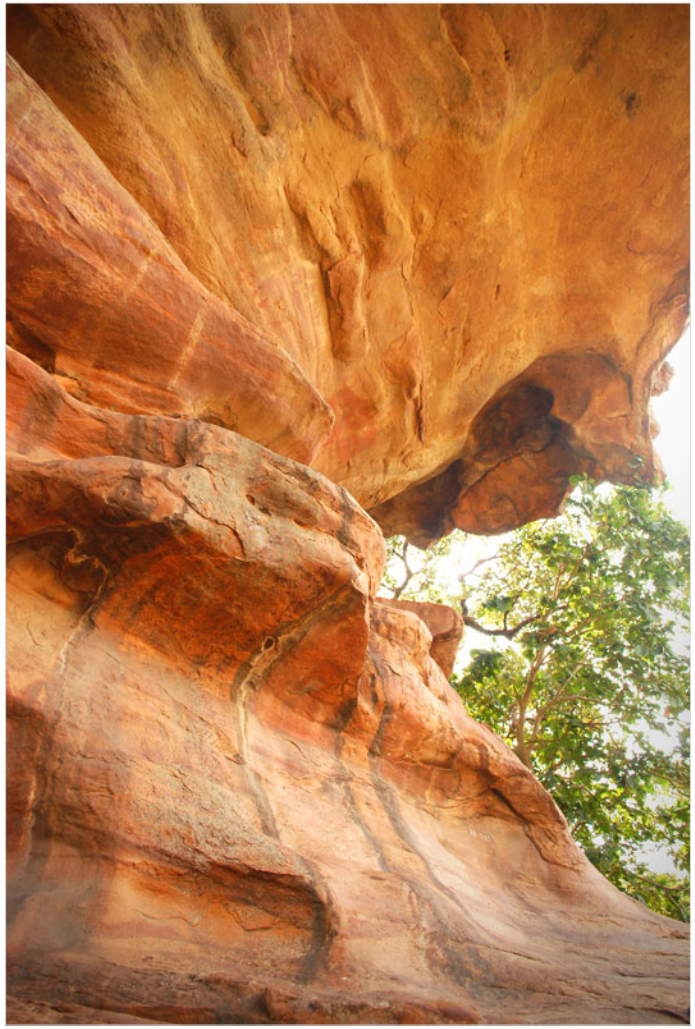
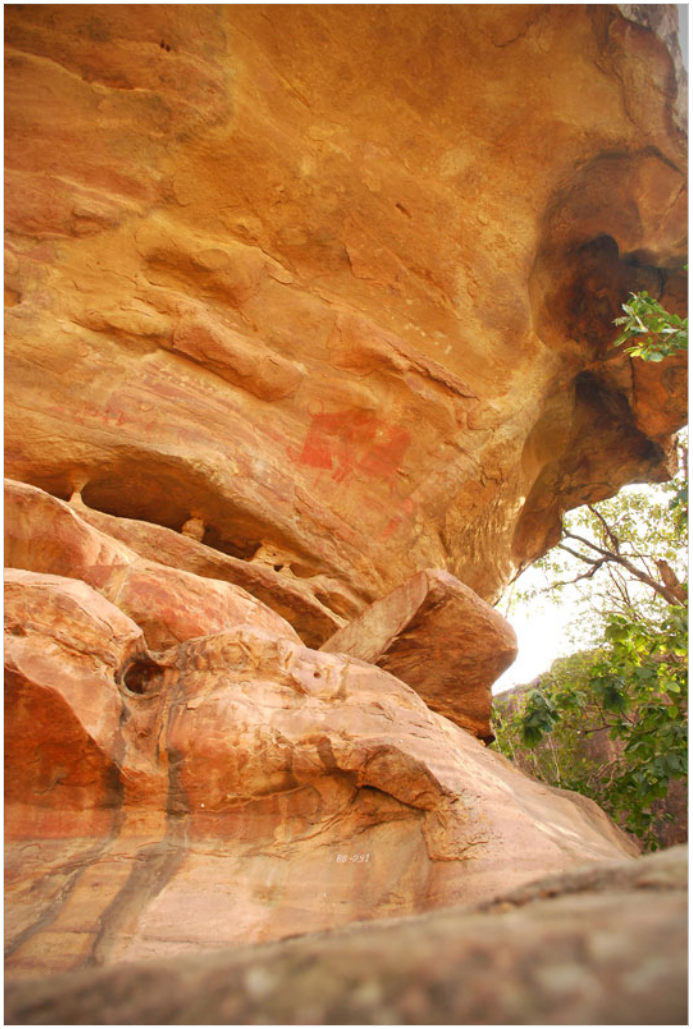
Rock Shelter 14

The mushroom shaped giant rock shelter is also known as Boar rock due to an enormous boar like mythical figure painted on its surface. It has two crescent shaped horns, a huge snout with whiskers and bristles on the back. The figure of a fleeing man and a crab is shown near its snout. There are three human figures near its forelegs and a fourth behind its hind legs. Five small-sized animal figures are also shown running in a row.





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1. Introduction
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5. Contact Details

Contact Details

This documentation was done by Palash Vaswani, Design Associate, IDC, IIT Bombay.

You can get in touch with him at palsonline[at]gmail.com

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